

# Who This Is For — and Who It Is Not

\*\*This is for:\*\* adults who want measurable output from limited space; people willing to track yields, simplify crop choices, and run a repeatable routine; renters/owners who can provide consistent water and stable light (sun or artificial).

\*\*This is not for:\*\* novelty crops, aesthetics-first gardens, or “set-and-forget” expectations; anyone who won’t water on schedule; anyone expecting calorie security from herbs and salad greens; anyone unwilling to discard underperformers and change the plan.

## WHY THIS IS HARDER THAN IT LOOKS

Small-space growing fails because of constraints that don’t negotiate.

First: \*\*it’s physics, not vibes.\*\* Containers are small soil volumes exposed to heat and wind. A short watering failure during a hot spell can depress production for the rest of that fruiting cycle.

Second: \*\*most crops don’t matter for “meaningful.”\*\* A meaningful fraction of your food comes from a narrow set of crops that reliably convert light and water into calories. Most small-space advice steers you toward low-calorie wins that look busy and leave your pantry unchanged.

Third: \*\*logistics beat technique.\*\* Soil volume, irrigation reliability, pest exclusion, and replacement planting determine yield. Beginners overspend on seeds and underspend on containers, mix quality, and watering reliability.

Fourth: \*\*microclimate decides.\*\* Balconies and patios amplify heat, wind, and reflected light. The same container can produce dramatically different results a few feet apart.

## WHAT ACTUALLY WORKS (BEST PRACTICES)

- \*\*Define “meaningful” upfront:\*\* weekly harvest weight is the only honest scoreboard.
- \*\*Water reliability sits upstream of everything:\*\* when water is inconsistent, everything else becomes noise.
- \*\*Fewer, larger containers change the game:\*\* 15–25 gallons outperforms many small pots; small pots behave like drought simulators.
- \*\*A “calories + nutrition” mix is the only mix that feels meaningful:\*\* at least one calorie crop (tubers/beans/squash) plus one nutrient green.
- \*\*Sun hours are a constraint, not a suggestion:\*\* <6 hours direct sun shifts you toward greens/beans unless you add grow lights.
- \*\*Pest exclusion is the adult move:\*\* netting/row cover prevents the late-response spiral.

- \*\*Trellising is control:\*\* it protects access, airflow, and harvesting more than it boosts yield.
- \*\*Replacement planting is normal:\*\* a plant that stalls for weeks is an output risk, not a project.
- \*\*Staggering keeps output continuous:\*\* 2–3 waves of greens/beans beats one peak-and-crash planting.
- \*\*Mulch buys stability:\*\* 2–4 inches reduces temperature swings and watering load.
- \*\*Light, regular feeding beats rescue feeding:\*\* neglect + “hero fertilizer” is a reliable way to invite pests and disorder.

## THE FEW DECISIONS THAT MATTER MOST

### 1) \*\*Light reality (sun or artificial)\*\*

- Trade-off: calories vs constraints.
- What matters: if you don't have  $\geq 6$  hours direct sun (or equivalent light), “meaningful” will come from greens/beans, not calorie crops.

### 2) \*\*Soil volume per plant\*\*

- Trade-off: fewer strong plants vs many weak ones.
- What matters: heavy fruiters need real volume; 15–25 gallons is where they stop acting fragile.

### 3) \*\*Watering system\*\*

- Trade-off: control vs reliability.
- What matters: if you routinely miss waterings in summer, scale the system to your life or automate; willpower doesn't fix heat.

### 4) \*\*Crop portfolio (max 6 crops in year 1)\*\*

- Trade-off: competence vs novelty.
- What matters: you want to learn \*one system\*, not collect experiences.

### 5) \*\*Calorie crop selection\*\*

- Trade-off: calories vs management complexity.
- What matters: potatoes/sweet potatoes and dry beans usually win on calories per effort; tomatoes win on satisfaction, not calories.

### 6) \*\*Pest posture\*\*

- Trade-off: exclusion vs reaction.
- What matters: if pests are common where you live, “reactive” becomes a seasonal tax; exclusion is how you keep momentum.

## A SIMPLE EXECUTION FRAMEWORK

### 1) \*\*Define what “meaningful” means in your household\*\*

What matters at this stage is measurement. If weight isn't tracked weekly, the system drifts into vibes.

## 2) \*\*Make constraints explicit\*\*

What matters at this stage is honesty: light, time, travel, and budget. A plan that conflicts with your calendar will fail quietly.

## 3) \*\*Build stability before ambition\*\*

What matters at this stage is removing predictable failure points (soil volume, mulch, water reliability). Seeds are easy; stability is the work.

## 4) \*\*Run a focused crop set with continuity\*\*

What matters at this stage is consistent output: staggered planting and space reserved for replacements.

## 5) \*\*Operate like maintenance, not emergencies\*\*

What matters at this stage is rhythm: water, scout, harvest, replant. Rescue cycles consume time and produce less.

## 6) \*\*Reallocate by evidence\*\*

What matters at this stage is detachment: underperformers lose space; reliable performers earn space.

# WHAT NOT TO DO (YEARS OF MISTAKES)

- Avoid \*\*starting with 15+ crop types\*\*.
- Don't use \*\*tiny containers\*\* for anything you expect to eat weekly.
- Avoid \*\*watering by mood\*\*.
- Don't treat fertilizer as a substitute for stable water.
- Avoid \*\*late pest response\*\*.
- Don't plant calorie crops in shade and blame the crop.
- Avoid \*\*one-time planting\*\* of greens.
- Don't keep weak plants "to see if they recover."
- Avoid variety obsession before water and soil are stable.
- Don't ignore wind; mitigate or relocate containers.
- Avoid unknown compost/inputs in containers.
- Don't scale plant count until you can run the system through the hottest month.

# EXPERT RULES OF THUMB

- If you can't water reliably, you can't harvest reliably.
- Container capacity is measured in \*\*waterings per week you can actually sustain\*\*.
- For heavy fruiters, \*\*bigger container beats better fertilizer\*\*.
- Stalled for 14+ days in prime season = lost asset.
- Pests twice in one week = exclusion time.
- Your best growing space is the space you can reach daily without friction.

- Greens are nutrition; tubers/beans are calories.
- Harvest is maintenance. Skip it and production slows.

## **WHEN TO ADJUST, SCALE BACK, OR STOP**

- Missing waterings weekly → shrink the system until misses stop.
- Repeated wilting in one location → treat the location as the problem: move containers or add shade/wind control.
- Escalating pest interventions with continued losses → change posture (exclusion) or change crops.
- Lots of leaves, little food weight → admit the mismatch: reallocate to calorie crops or larger containers.
- Inputs (soil/water/time) remain unstable → stop scaling; run a smaller stable system until it's boring.

## **CLOSING PERSPECTIVE**

Small-space food is operations: measurement, reliability, replacement, sequencing. Structure orients you; consistency delivers the harvest.

This reflects what remains after years of practice.